

RING PRESENTATION CEREMONY
22 AUG 03

Good evening, General Lennox, General Kaufman, Cadet Williams, and members of the Class of 2004. I am delighted to have the honor of sharing this important occasion with you. The presentation of your class ring is a great moment, a symbolic and tangible milestone, and a time that mixes reflection with anticipation. The military retreat ceremony just a few minutes ago was a fitting preamble to this event, full of emotion, esprit, and pride. So it should be.

You have waited three long years for this ceremony – three years of challenges, hard work and accomplishment. Over those three years, your class has demonstrated that you are fully prepared for the challenges to come, *<pause>* both here at West Point and, more importantly, later in your army career.

Rings have had universal symbolism since the 16th Century B.C., most frequently to represent authority and commitment to a cause or a principle. Your authority will come from your commission, to be granted upon the approval of our Commander-in-Chief in nine short months.

Your commitment comes from the heart. It is a commitment to the values of the Academy and the Profession of Arms; values such as integrity, selfless service, duty, and loyalty. It is a commitment to excellence for ourselves and our organizations in all that we do. It is a commitment to sacrifice for the greater

good, whether it be of personal time for the benefit of the unit in peacetime, or the sacrifice of personal safety for the welfare of your soldiers and the nation in time of war.

It is a commitment that was embraced by CPT James Adamowski, Class of 1995, killed in action in Iraq on 2 April 2003.

It is a commitment that was embraced by LTC Rocky Baragona, Class of 1982, killed in Iraq on 19 May 2003.

It is a commitment that was embraced by CPT Josh Byers, Class of 1996, killed in action in Ramadi, Iraq, on 23 July 2003.

It is a commitment that was embraced by 1LT Leif Nott, Class of 2000, killed in action in Belaruz, Iraq, on 30 July 2003.

It is a commitment that was embraced by Cadet Peter Heuchling, Class of 2006, who died yesterday less than 200 meters from where we are standing, doing what we ask all of you to do – striving to be the best and giving your all. Twenty-four hours ago, he stood in your ranks. Especially remember him and his family.

It is a commitment to duty that you must embrace, for you will always be known by your chosen motto – *“For Country and Corps”*. Who among you, when you chose your motto three years ago, would have known the true significance of those words in these times and how well it would describe your commitment to the Nation?

The presentation of the rings this evening symbolically strengthens your class and binds it to the Long Gray Line. The national collegiate tradition of wearing class rings began with the USMA Class of 1835. Since then, West Point classes have continued, with only one exception, the tradition of designing and wearing a ring unique to their class. The storied history of the West Point ring is replete with tales of heroics and unqualified devotion to the ideals and principles of the Academy and Nation. To further strengthen your ties to the Long Gray Line, you also have the gold from the rings of 18 previous graduates, donated by graduates or their families from the classes of 1901 to 1957, incorporated into your class rings. Think of them, their service and their sacrifice and their commitment, when you look at your ring.

As you don your ring for the first time today and for this final year, wear the ring so that your class crest faces inward, toward your heart. This is to remind you, while in your last year at West Point, of your duty to pursue excellence, to lead and to develop the Corps of Cadets, to inspire them with your personal example and to prepare yourself for the leadership challenges of a commissioned officer. Upon graduation, tradition dictates that you reverse the ring so the Academy crest faces inward, to remind you of your duty to the Army and the Nation. When you slip that ring on your finger, I hope you will think for a moment of the responsibility you will be taking upon yourselves. It is not an obligation that can be fulfilled by

any single act, nor any finite number of accomplishments. It will not be fulfilled with five years of service. Rather, these rings are physical and ever-present reminders that you have accepted an ***obligation*** to live by the West Point ethos for a career and a lifetime, to dedicate yourselves to a lifetime of Duty, Honor, Country. To do anything less will be to betray the trust placed in you.

Class of 2004, your nation is at war and is calling you to lead its sons and daughters into harm's way – make sure you are ready. Renew your commitment as you place your class ring on your finger. My congratulations to you for reaching this milestone in your cadet career and for taking another step towards joining the Long Gray Line. Stay committed to excellence, *For Country and Corps*.